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Somebody Should Resign

A few weeks after British Foreign Secretary Lord Carrington resigned over the Argentine takeover of the Falklands, a Reagan aide passed around a piece of paper at a senior staff meeting. Referring to Carrington, whom Alexander Haig, at a private staff meeting, had once called a "duplicious bastard," the note read: "Duplicious Bastard Resigns on Principle: A Model."

In America, we cannot get even our sweetest bumbler to resign. We have no model, no tradition of principled resignation. Now, because of the Iranian affair, there is talk of leave-taking. But, as usual, we just cannot get it right. The wrong man is thinking of resigning.

The wrong man is Secretary of State George Shultz. Spear-carrier for the administration's anti-terrorist policy, Shultz is embarrassed. He has beaten up on the Europeans for making separate peace with terrorist states. He has assured the Arab League that the United States was not supporting Iran in its war with Iraq. All the while, the National Security Council has been engaged with Iran in an arms-for-hostages exchange.

The right man for resigning is NSC chief John Poindexter. Poindexter now admits that he made "a miscalculation" on whom he could trust in Iran. (The mullahs have a way of driving Americans to understatement. President Carter called the Desert One fiasco an "incomplete success.") If someone does resign, it shouldn't be the man who pushed the right policy, but the man who pushed the wrong one.

How wrong? Let me count the ways. Even if you cave in and decide to buy hostages, how can you possibly consent to buy them retail, one at a time? When the Israelis made the worst hostage trade in history, 1,150 terrorists for 3 soldiers, at least they got all three of their boys.

The administration cover story is that the real policy was not buying hostages, but buying friends. The United States was not paying ransom. It was pursuing a larger strategic objective: making alliances with Iranian doves as an opening to a

post-Khomeini future. Goodness. Has there ever been an appeasement policy that was not predicated on the notion of hawks and doves among our enemies? We must offer wheat and credits and perhaps pieces of Africa or Central America in order to strengthen Soviet—or Sandinista or Angolan, fill in the blanks—doves. Heard that one? Whenever conservatives hear it, their instinctive, and correct, response is ridicule.

Now we hear that there is a power struggle taking place among Ayatollah Khomeini's successors, and we have to help the doves. There is a problem with this theory. True, there are several factions vying for power. But there is not a shred of evidence that any one is any less Islamic-fanatic or anti-Western than the other. Nor, even if such a faction exists, that we know which one it is. Nor, even if we know, that we know how to help it. One would imagine that in Khomeini-land, a connection to the Great Satan is hardly a means to political advancement.

The president has been flying a seat-of-the-pants foreign policy for some time now. (Reykjavik comes to mind.) It has now crash-landed. Reagan likes to pilot listening to his gut, not watching his radar. His gut—sympathy for hostage families—told him to risk for the hostages. He did. He risked America's antiterrorist policy. He risked American credibility with the Gulf states and Arab moderates. He risked his own principle, enunciated during his first week in office, that criminals, even if state-sponsored, will not dictate American foreign policy. He risked and he lost.

Reagan's legendary luck ran out. Where were his advisers in the White House whose job it is to tell him that he can't live on luck alone? Whose job it is to watch the radar? Miscalculation is not a hanging offense, but it is a resigning one.

An antiterrorism policy is extraordinarily difficult to sustain because, like any policy of *not* doing (no negotiation, no concessions), it is inherently fragile: one significant slip and the policy evaporates. Right now, the U.S. policy is about to evaporate.

It cannot easily be salvaged. But a principled resignation is the first step on the road back. It would demonstrate that the policy of trading arms, and the American national interest, for hostages is repudiated. That policy, not the choice of loose-lipped Iranians as partners, is the miscalculation. Carrington miscalculated Argentine intentions and resigned. Will the American miscalculator please stand up and step down?